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Country note**

Honduras

Summary

The Executive Director presents the country note for Honduras for a programme of cooperation for the period 2002-2006.

The situation of children and women

1. The population of Honduras, estimated at 5.9 million in 1999, has an annual growth rate of 2.8 per cent. Of the total population, 50.1 per cent are children under 18 years of age. Despite growth in gross national product (GNP) between 1990 and 1998 of 3.4 per cent, the economy is still characterized by structural vulnerabilities in the traditional agricultural and informal sectors, and by high fluctuations in international prices of the main export products (coffee and bananas).

2. Real income increased by 8.9 per cent between 1997 and 1998, but the impact of Hurricane Mitch — hitting Honduras in October 1998 — caused a drop of 10.1 per cent between 1998 and 1999. It has been estimated that Mitch affected 80 per cent of the population and increased poverty from 63.1 per cent to 65.9 per cent between 1998 and 1999, affecting women more than men. Foreign debt, estimated at $4.05 billion in 2000, with a debt/GNP ratio of 69 per cent, is a heavy burden for the economy. GNP per capita was only $760 for 1999, and the country is classified among the Highly Indebted Poor Countries.

* E/ICEF/2001/2.

** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its second regular session of 2001.

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3. Honduras has undergone important changes in the last two decades in the area of democratization. The creation of the post of National Human Rights Commissioner and of the Interior Ministry represents major advancement aimed at consolidating the rule of law. Conversely, progress has yet to be made in strengthening the autonomy of the judiciary and in consolidating the decentralization process.

4. Honduras has achieved 13 of the 27 goals of the World Summit for Children. Important progress is being made in the achievement of the remaining 14 goals, although intensified efforts will be required to reach universal coverage in education and water and sanitation. Between 1990 and 1997, the infant mortality rate decreased from 50 to 42 per 1,000 live births, and under-five mortality diminished from 65 to 53 per 1,000 live births. The high immunization coverage rate (more than 90 per cent for all vaccines) has significantly reduced the incidence of vaccine-preventable diseases. The gradual improvement of food fortification (currently at 80 per cent for iodization of salt, Vitamin A fortification of sugar, and iron fortification of flour) has contributed to a partial control of micronutrient deficiencies. However, acute respiratory infections, diarrhoeal diseases and problems during the peri-natal stage constitute the main causes of infant mortality, and are related to poor living conditions and inadequate basic services delivery, e.g., reduced access to safe water (77 per cent nationally and 63 per cent in rural areas) and to sanitation (74 per cent nationally and 57 per cent in rural areas). Chronic malnutrition, which affects 41 per cent of school children between the ages of 6 and 9, has not changed in the last decade.

5. Formal and non-formal pre-school coverage is at 35 per cent, while net primary education coverage is 86 per cent. Repetition and drop-out rates are a concern, with major problems during the first three grades of primary school. In 1999, the primary repetition rate averaged 7.2 per cent, with first grade repetition at 18.5 per cent. Finally, Hurricane Mitch seriously affected the school infrastructure nationwide and caused temporary lack of access and overcrowding.

6. The situation of child and adolescent labour has also worsened since Hurricane Mitch. The 10- to 18-year age group represents 16 per cent of the economically active population; 27 per cent are girls and 65 per cent live in rural areas. During the 1990-1998 period, the number of adolescent workers doubled, from 90,000 to 180,000, in the category of independent worker, while the participation of adolescent workers in the category "domestic help" increased fivefold, from 20,000 to 100,000, over the same period. Limited secondary school access and enrolment, calculated for the 1995-1997 period at 29 per cent for males and 37 per cent for females, is a major factor leading to increased adolescent labour.

7. HIV/AIDS is a serious problem in Honduras. Since 1989, a total of 15,000 cases have been reported. According to the Ministry of Health, transmission is mainly heterosexual, and children, adolescents and adults are affected, with women representing 40 per cent of cases. There are 1,138 registered cases of HIV/AIDS among those under 19 year of age, and of this total, 50 per cent are children under the age of 4. The pandemic is a problem that threatens the entire Honduran population, regardless of age.

8. One of the great changes in the labour force has been the increased absorption of women into the labour market. In the area of women's rights, significant advances were made in the second half of the 1990s with the creation of the National Institute

for Women, the approval of the Law against Domestic Violence, and the enactment of the Law for Equal Opportunities.

Lessons learned from past cooperation

9. The mid-term review of the country programme revealed that: (a) although children's issues are a priority in local government plans, in line with commitments made by mayors within the Municipal Pact for Children, additional efforts are required at the municipal level for disaster prevention and preparedness; (b) community participation has been effective and successful in empowering communities to become the main actors of change; and (c) reduced integration and coordination between programmes and between United Nations agencies led to duplication of efforts and dispersal of resources. The achievement of project objectives and improved use of existing resources require broader institutional links between UNICEF and implementing institutions, which is being addressed in the present programming process.

10. Mobilizing municipal governments and communities in support of children's rights was essential to initiate, expand and strengthen the decentralization process in favour of improved child-related services. A continuation of this municipal capacity-building initiative is necessary to guarantee the best resource utilization and to strengthen coordination among partners.

11. Effective and timely responses to Hurricane Mitch in providing water, food, blankets, essential medicine and psychosocial relief proved to be crucial to meet the basic needs of the population, particularly children and women. Close coordination with government information systems; and the establishment of relevant, rapid and accurate information and communication systems among UNICEF country, regional and headquarters offices and National Committees proved to be critical to define responsibilities, mobilize funds and ensure the logistical organization of relief efforts.

12. Another important lesson pertaining to emergencies is the comparative advantages derived from the favourable image and wide recognition of UNICEF. The organization can play an important role in leading coordinated efforts in favour of children, with a view to preventing the duplication of interventions and dispersal of resources, in order to increase the impact of assistance to those affected by emergencies, and to ensure the inclusion of a component of emergency preparedness and early response in development plans.

Proposed country programme strategy

13. The overall goal of the proposed country programme is to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of children, adolescents and women, in terms of their survival, development, protection and participation. Ensuring the effective promotion and fulfilment of rights is critical to this effort and will be emphasized. The programme strategy and goals are based on a participatory process involving the Government and civil society organizations. Both will respond to and support the National Poverty Reduction Strategy, to which the Government and civil society are committed, with international cooperation agency support.

14. The programme of cooperation will be guided by the adoption of a child rights-based perspective and the life cycle approach, and will be reinforced through: (a) initiatives linked to the demand for and promotion and guarantee of human rights; (b) actions for promoting and supporting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and (c) the involvement of civil society. A concerted effort will be made to increase the linkages between the different programmes, concentrating efforts in priority rural and urban areas. In addition, collaboration will be strengthened between UNICEF and other United Nations organizations, donor agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOS) — those working for children, adolescents and women — enabling a synergy in policy and programme activities.

15. The main country programme strategies include: advocacy to increase political will and financial resources to sustain past achievements and to advance towards full attainment of commitments of the World Summit and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; social mobilization and communication to create public demand and participation, at all levels, but with special emphasis on municipal-level actions as part of the Municipal Pact for Children and with families; capacity-building to strengthen decentralization processes and local/municipal involvement in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of child- and adolescent-targeted interventions (including government and NGO counterparts); and development and dissemination of inclusive and sustainable service delivery models — developed at local levels and projected for national implementation — to reach and respond to the most excluded children.

16. The cooperation programme will include two main programme areas, combining crosscutting strategies of a national scope, with specific decentralized sectoral interventions aimed at achieving the commitments of the World Summit and the Global Movement for Children.

17. Through the cross-cutting *child rights promotion, public policy and social protection programme*, objectives will be targeted to: (a) incorporating the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the adoption of laws, design of policies, and allocation of government budgets; (b) disseminating information and mobilizing civil society in support of new social ethics and practices that consider the well-being of children as a right and create public demand and effective participation; (c) strengthening national and decentralized information systems to monitor child rights compliance and target mobilization and intervention actions for the most excluded children; and (d) planning, monitoring and evaluating — together with counterparts — the development and implementation of UNICEF-supported initiatives and other government programmes related to the commitments of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Programme initiatives will focus on achieving national impact, utilizing and building on municipal-level experiences in priority regions.

18. The *child rights compliance programme*, focusing on strengthened decentralization and integration of sectoral interventions at the municipal level, will — together with government and NGO counterparts — concentrate on the achieving the following in targeted areas (municipalities): (a) reduction of infant and under-five mortality; (b) expansion of early childhood care and development programmes, with an emphasis on parent involvement and empowerment, prevention of child abuse and abandonment, and elimination of developmental risks

and delays; (c) expansion of pre-school education and adequate strategies to facilitate transition to first grade; (d) improvement of the quality of education and inclusion of the excluded, especially in the first three grades; (e) reduction of child labour and protection of working adolescents (those legally able to work); (f) establishment of legislation to protect adolescents in conflict with the law; (g) prevention of and protection against HIV/AIDS, with the main focus on children, adolescents and women; (h) reduction of maternal mortality; and (i) establishment of legal mechanisms for the defence of women's rights. Specific emphasis will be given to strengthening family involvement and capacity in all aspects related to programme priorities.

19. The strategy and priority areas of the programme of cooperation are based on the Common Country Assessment (CCA), and will adhere closely to the priorities of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) currently being prepared, ensuring consistency with the overall assistance strategy and with initiatives carried out by other United Nations agencies. With an increased presence of development cooperation partners in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch, efforts will continue to ensure a complementary role and synergy in areas of common concern affecting women and children. Partnerships with bilateral and multilateral agencies established in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch will be strengthened, while coordination with major international NGOs will be expanded.

Estimated programme budget

Estimated programme of cooperation, 2002-2006[a]

(In thousands of United States dollars)

	Regular resources	*Other resources*	*Total*
Child rights promotion, public policy and social protection	1 456	2 500	3 956
Child rights compliance	2 184	3 750	5 934
Cross-sectoral costs	620	0	620
Total	**4 260**	**6 250**	**10 510**

[a] These are indicative figures only which are subject to change once aggregate financial data are finalized.